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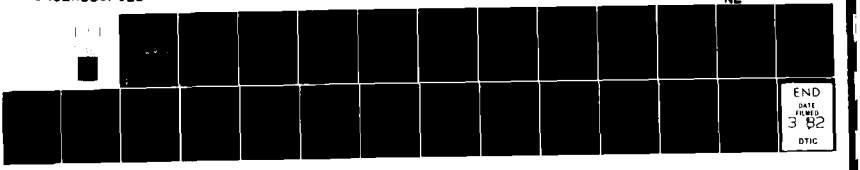

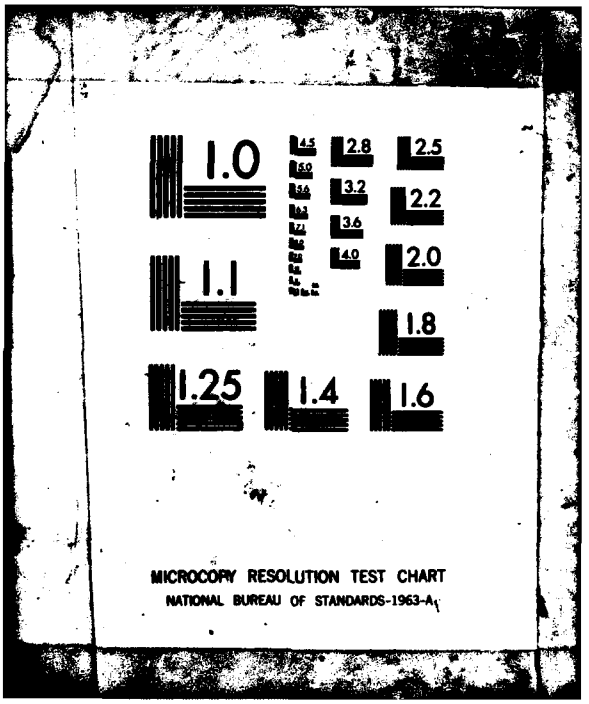
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# SOVIET INTERESTS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICY OPTIONS IN SOUTHWEST ASIA



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# SOVIET INTERESTS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICY OPTIONS IN SOUTHWEST ASIA

by

Jiri Valenta
and
Shannon R. Butler

30 December 1981

## DISCLAIMER

The views of the authors do not purport to reflect the positions of the Department of the Army, Department of the Navy, Department of the Air Force, or the Department of Defense.

Composition of this memorandum was accomplished by Mrs. Susan B. McKeehan.

## FOREWORD

This memorandum evolved from the Military Policy Symposium on "US Strategic Interests in Southwest Asia: A Long Term Commitment?" which was sponsored by the Strategic Studies Institute in October 1981. During the Symposium, academic and government experts discussed a number of issues concerning this area which will have a continuing impact on US strategy. This memorandum considers one of these issues.

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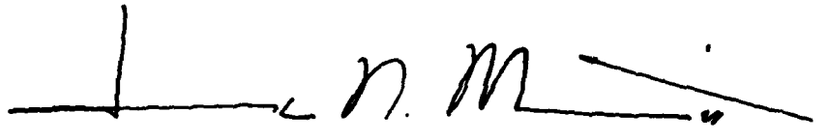
This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the College, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.



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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF THE AUTHORS

DR. JIRI VALENTA is Associate Professor and Coordinator of Soviet and East European Studies in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California. He is the author of *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision* and a co-editor of *Eurocommunism between East and West, Communist States and Africa,* and the forthcoming volume, *Soviet Decisionmaking for National Security.* He has also written many articles and contributed to numerous books on Soviet foreign policy, national security, and comparative communism. He was a Research Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institutions in 1973-74. Dr. Valenta is currently an International Relations Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation and an International Affairs Fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER SHANNON R. BUTLER, US Navy, received her bachelor's degree from St. Cloud State University and her master's degree from the Naval Postgraduate School. She is currently an instructor of Political Science at the US Air Force Academy. Commander Butler has served as a Soviet naval operations analyst at the Navy Field Operational Intelligence Office, Ft. Meade, Maryland, and at the Fleet Ocean Surveillance Information Center in London, United Kingdom. She was also administrative assistant to the Director, Naval Reserve Intelligence Program, and has served as a United Nations Command liaison officer in Seoul, Korea.

# SOVIET INTERESTS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICY OPTIONS IN SOUTHWEST ASIA

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 focused, essentially for the first time, American policymakers' attention on this often neglected country (by the United States, at least) of the Third World. While Iran and the whole Persian Gulf area have been of continuing high interest to the United States, Afghanistan (and the substantial Soviet presence there during the last 26 years) had been viewed as being outside the periphery of American "national interest." Since the invasion, however, speculations and postulations, from a variety of directions, have issued forth on the invasion in a continuous stream. Arguments over the "why's" and "wherefore's"of the Soviet intervention have ranged over a broad spectrum: there are those who assert that the Soviet move was purely defensive in nature and was aimed at securing stability on the southern flank of the USSR (for example, George Kennan and Geoffrey Warhurst);[1] at the other end of the scale is a group, including such notable Soviet specialists as Richard Pipes, who decry the intervention as another step in a Soviet "grand strategy" of (eventual) worldwide dominance. Only a few have discerned that

the invasion, in fact, contained elements of both. (Among those in this latter group are Jiri Valenta and Vernon Aspaturian.)

Table I more clearly illustrates both the defensive and offensive elements of the invasion. Rather than terming Soviet objectives/interests in the area as either offensive or defensive in nature, this table identifies these elements as being either core, middle-range or long-range objectives, and attempts to place these objectives within the framework of the many factors (to be subsequently discussed, but which include historical, geostrategic and economic factors) that determine Soviet foreign policy. The table is not intended to be totally inclusive, but rather to graphically highlight two things: (1) Soviet interests across a broad spectrum; (2) both the offensive and defensive elements of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the implications for the entire Southwest Asia (SWA) region and the Persian Gulf.

As can be seen from the table, this paper centers its attention primarily upon Afghanistan and Iran, with only passing reference to Pakistan. Soviet interests (and for that matter, pre-Soviet Russian interests) in Iran are inextricably connected to the Afghanistan issue since a Soviet foothold in the latter presents both opportunities and risks in a policy aimed at, if not control, then influence projection into Iran. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, then, can be viewed not only in the context of securing stability on the USSR's southern border, but also in the broader context of an extension of Soviet hegemony into the Persian Gulf.

Before proceeding with a discussion of Soviet interests, objectives and policy options in SWA, it is necessary to state the underlying assumptions which provide the analytical perspective of the authors and from which all discussion and conclusions flow. First, as has been discussed, the authors believe that the invasion, while certainly providing the Soviet Union with new opportunities for influence projection beyond Afghanistan (particularly into Iran), was undertaken, first and foremost, because of overriding security concerns. These concerns were immediate in the sense that the Afghan regime was perceived as unable to control the situation and that the leader himself, Hufzullah Amin, was viewed as politically unreliable. Long-term security concerns were probably also taken into account in the decision to invade, i.e., the potential for unrest among the Muslim population of the Soviet Central Asian Republics given continued Islamic resurgence across the

southern flank of the USSR and the long-term demographic trends within the USSR itself.

Secondly, Afghanistan has played an important historical role, by virtue of its geographic position, as a corridor of transit for expansionist nations, regardless of which direction they came from or which direction they were headed. Thus, Afghanistan may have figured in Soviet assessments, not only of and for itself, but also as a corridor for future expansion or, perhaps, as a buffer to the perceived expansionist inclinations of other nations.

The third assumption deals with the role of China in Soviet decisionmaking. While it is not assumed here that the China factor was a compelling, prominent reason for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet assessment probably did not totally exclude this factor either. The question of China in Soviet decisionmaking was probably a considered factor in Soviet-Cuban intervention in Angola in 1975-76 (the PRC supported the factions which opposed the ultimately victorious Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola-MPLA), and in the Shaba II invasion of 1978.[2] China's attempts to gain influence in Pakistan, Iran (before the downfall of the Shah), and in Afghanistan itself before the invasion may have been a cause for concern in Kremlin minds and, hence, a factor (albeit a minor one perhaps) in the decision to intervene in Afghanistan.

To "set the stage" for the discussion which follows, and which is based upon the aforementioned assumptions, it is helpful to briefly review the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its aftermath.

## INVASION

*Instability and Preparations.* While Afghanistan has never exhibited a great degree of political and social stability, regardless of the form of government under which it found itself, events following the April 1978 coup (in which political control was turned over to a shaky coalition of Marxist factions headed by Noor Mohammed Taraki) quickly descended in an ever-increasing spiral into more chaos and more instability, and presaged growing Soviet concern over its southern neighbor. The conclusion of a Soviet-Afghanistan Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in December 1978, following months of increasing instability, is notable in at least two closely related respects when

| | CORE | MIDDLE-RANGE | LONG-RANGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **HISTORICAL** | 1. Afghanistan as a buffer zone to defend against US*/British expansion and instability of "arc of crisis" (defensive) | 1. Extension of Soviet influence into rest of SWA, Indian sub-continent and Persian Gulf (offensive)<br>2. Access to ports in Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf (offensive) | 1. Actual Soviet ports on Indian Ocean (offensive) |
| **GEOSTRATEGIC** | As above, plus:<br>2. Outflanking PRC to preclude Chinese influence in Afghanistan and neighbors--security considerations (defensive) | As above, plus:<br>3. Outflanking PRC; expanded to include SE Asia as "the back door" to China (offensive) | As above, plus:<br>2. Eventual, sufficient pressure (mil/pol/econ) to bring China back into the fold |
| **ECONOMIC** | 1. Access to SWA resources and enhanced economic relations (trade/aid) with other SWA nations (defensive) | 1. USSR influence (but not control) over flow of oil/natural gas (offensive) | 1. USSR control over flow; denial if necessary (offensive) |

*The United States was the successor to the British in continuing competition with the USSR.

Table I. Determining Factors/Objectives of Soviet Foreign Policy in Southwest Asia.

A. For analytical purposes, the "national interests" of the Soviet Union can be broken down into three distinct categories. These categories and their definitions are:

1. Core Interests: Related to self-preservation of a political entity (for example, the concept of "Defense of the Homeland"); "core" interests can/may also include the desire for ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic unity.

2. Middle-range Objectives: Related to an increase in prestige, economic betterment for one's people, various forms of self-extension/imperialism.

3. Long-range Goals: Refers to plans concerning the ultimate political or ideological organization of the international system (or a subsystem, such as Southwest Asia), rules that govern that that system, and the role of specific states within that system/subsystem.*

B. The factors determining Soviet foreign policy included in this table are Historical, Geostrategic, and Economic. As can be noted, these factors often overlap and complement each other.

C. Core interests are (almost) always defensive in nature; middle-range objectives and long-range goals are primarily offensive, but can have defensive overtones if their achievement is perceived as necessary to protect "core" interests. Core interests change and through self-extension, middle-range objectives can become core interests. A good example of middle-range objectives evolving into core interests and of core interests changing can be seen in the case of the rise and fall of the British empire. Britain's original interest in establishing colonies was primarily commercial and was a middle-range objective (economic betterment; self-extension). As more British subjects settled in the colonies, governmental apparatus had to be established to properly administer the colonies, including use of military forces to preserve and protect. Britain's colonies evolved into a vital national interest--a "core" interest. When the sun finally began to set on the Empire, Britain accepted and, in many cases, encouraged independence movements--the protection of overseas colonies was no longer a "core" interest.

*The conceptual framework for this table was taken from K. J. Holsti, "Foreign Policy Objectives," International Politics: A Framework for Analysis, 3d ed, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977, pp. 138-163.

Table I. Determining Factors/Objectives of Soviet Foreign Policy in Southwest Asia (concluded).

viewed in light of the uncertainty of the Marxists to retain power: first is the fact that the Soviets would conclude such a treaty with a "weak" regime and secondly, that this same treaty was subsequently used as one of several justifications for the invasion. It could, perhaps, be surmised that even at that early date the Kremlin foresaw the distinct possibility or necessity of a future intervention "to safeguard the gains of socialism" and thus concluded in advance the necessary documentation for just such a move. Valenta has noted that the actual decision to intervene militarily was probably not made until late November 1979 and was not easily reached, although contingency planning for the event was probably begun several months ahead of time.[3] However, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Soviet Union, having witnessed the inability of the "friendly" forces to control the unfolding of events, desired to insert a degree of their own control—hence the treaty.

In early 1979, two major events highlighted the growing instability of the entire region: the assassination of US Ambassador to Afghanistan, Adolph Dubs, and the attack on the American embassy in Teheran by Iranian leftists. These were quickly followed in March of 1979 by the mutiny of Afghan Army elements at Herat in which Soviet civilians and military personnel were killed. Shortly thereafter in April 1979, General Aleksei A. Epishev, head of the Soviet Main Political Administration, headed a military delegation to Afghanistan to assess the deteriorating situation. His visit resulted in additional military equipment being sent to the Kabul government.[4]

Throughout the summer of 1979, the rebels realized sporadic successes in the more remote regions of the country, not necessarily as a result of more coordination of their operations after the establishment of a "National Rescue Front" in early June, but more likely because of the disaffection and disintegration of the Afghan Army. However, even in Kabul and the nearby Bagram Air Base, disruptive demonstrations and periodic rebel attacks occurred during June and July of 1979. As rebel activity intensified, so too did Soviet involvement.

In August 1979, a Soviet military delegation, led by General I. Pavlovskii, Deputy Minister of Defense/Commander in Chief, Soviet Ground Forces, paid a 2-month visit to Afghanistan. The delegation's temporary assignment in the country gave it the

opportunity to witness first-hand the September coup which culminated in the death of Taraki and the rise to power of his Prime Minister, Hufzullah Amin. As Valenta has noted, General Pavlovskii's reports "very probably concluded that the regime was slowly disintegrating and that a few thousand Soviet advisors would not be able to stabilize the situation."[5]

The Soviet response to the September coup and the subsequent spread of violence and rebellion was immediate and intensive, and included, among other things, increased activity along the Afghan border by deployed units, Soviet assumption of direct command of Afghan units, Soviet direction of counterinsurgency operations, and a substantial increase in the number of combat units inside Afghanistan through an airlift into Kabul and Bagram in late September.

*Intervention.* By late November, Soviet combat and support troops were in positions to assist the invasion, should that be necessary. Aside from the military preparations which were taken as necessary steps to the invasion, a propaganda offensive was initiated in support of the Khomeini regime. This anti-American, pro-Khomeini offensive was essentially an about-face for the USSR, which had, before the hostage crisis, labeled Khomeini as a fanatic and his rule as economically disastrous and politically repressive.[6] Following the seizure of the US embassy, Soviet broadcasts to Iran (as well as other Soviet news media) took on a consistently positive approach to the Khomeini regime and began to focus attention upon American military preparations and possible forceful US actions against that regime. The most likely objective of this Soviet action was to ensure that the hostage crisis would continue and thus would remain the major preoccupation of American decisionmakers. The propaganda campaign, then, acted as a "smokescreen" to divert US (and world) attention away from Afghanistan while Soviet decisionmakers finalized "contingency" invasion plans.

On December 21-22, and then again on December 24, the Soviets took the final steps of the preparatory stage by airlifting a parachute regiment into Bagram and an airborne division into Kabul, respectively. On December 27, this Soviet division played the decisive role in the successful coup against Amin which saw Babrak Karmel emerge as the new Afghan leader after his covert return from Czechoslovakia in the days preceding the coup.

*Aftermath.* Military intervention has not resolved the problems of instability and continued revolt in Afghanistan. On the other hand, those who continue to analogize that Afghanistan will be the Soviet Union's "Vietnam" fail to take into account several important interrelated factors that have a direct bearing on the situation. First, while the Soviets may not be able to "control" the countryside (who ever has?), they can probably contain the rebels to certain areas, maintain the security of major cities and lines of communications, and proceed from these stepping stones to stabilize and strengthen the Karmal government itself. Secondly, the lack of massive external aid for the rebels mitigates against their achieving a strong enough position in the military sphere which could be translated into a viable political bargaining chip. Thirdly, the Soviets have demonstrated (with North Vietnam, for example, during the Vietnam War) that once committed to a course of action, they will stick by that commitment; they have already indicated their intentions not to pull out until the "subversive elements" which brought about the intervention have been removed. Related to this point is the fact that, although the Kremlin has exhibited sensitivity to potential public reactions to Soviet casualties (for example, the Soviet wounded are flown to hospitals in Eastern European countries, and funerals for Soviet dead are controlled in such a fashion as to minimize the impact on the general populace,) domestic pressures on the government in an authoritarian regime are not a major restriction (if a restriction at all) in foreign policy decisions, especially when those decisions are considered vital to the security of the nation.

Finally, as one author noted, the Oxus is not the Pacific Ocean.[7] In terms of total cost and resource expenditures for transportation and logistics, the Soviet Union's burden will be less, perhaps far less, than the burden imposed by the American effort in Vietnam. This is not to deny the very real possibility that continued Soviet occupation of Afghanistan will be costly to them in terms of manpower and resource expenditures, as well as potential political setbacks, particularly in the Islamic world. Despite these real and potential "losses," however, overriding Soviet security concerns point to a long-term presence in Afghanistan. Even as the Soviet Union cannot afford to let any of its Eastern European buffer states, and in particular Poland (given its geostrategic importance to the USSR), slip out of its control, so too the southern buffer, as

represented by Afghanistan, must remain within the Soviet sphere of influence.

More importantly (perhaps), should Soviet troops be withdrawn at "some" point, it will only be after the pro-Soviet Afghanistan government is in control of the situation and Soviet influence in the country has been firmly established. If, and when, this situation is realized, the immediate defensive objective of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan will have been achieved, and offensive objectives can then take precedence. This is not to understate the case that even with the present situation, the offensive elements of the intervention are not at work. While, first and foremost, the immediate concern for Kremlin decisionmakers must be to contain dissidence and stabilize the situation, on a broader front, opportunities are not lacking to expand Soviet influence throughout the region by political, economic, and even limited military methods (for example, arms and training for the Baluchis in Pakistan and Iran).

Having completed a brief discussion of the intervention and the aftermath, it is necessary to explore more fully those factors that made the fact of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, if not inevitable, then at least feasible, and that, in their integrated and overlapping combinations, highlight those defensive and offensive elements which have been, and will be, subsequently discussed.

## HISTORICAL FACTORS

*Russian Imperialism.* Southward expansion toward the Indian Ocean and its warm water ports has been part of the Russian foreign policy agenda since at least Peter the Great.

During the 19th century, Russia, plus the other great power in the area, England, played a great power chess game with Afghanistan as the board which separated their spheres of influence. Russian interest in Afghanistan in the first half of the 19th century was concerned primarily with commercial interests, but also contained an element of security concern, as a result of British activity in the area. Count Nesselrode, the Russian Foreign Minister, illustrated these two elements (i.e. commercial and security) in an 1838 dispatch to the Russian Ambassador in England. The message referred in part to:

> . . .indefatigable activity displayed by English travellers in spreading disquiet among the people of Central Asia, and in carrying agitation even into the heart of countries bordering on our frontiers; while on our part we ask nothing but to be admitted to share in fair competition the commercial advantages of Asia[8]

Yet, Russia was not yet directly involved in Afghanistan. It was, rather, establishing and consolidating its empire in the Kirghiz steppes area, northeast of the present day borders of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan proper, Soviet influence was exercised through Persian "proxies," who, at the behest of the Russians, attacked Herat in 1838. Their siege of the city was unsuccessful, as a British threat of war forced the Persian shah to withdraw. Thus, the initial Russian probes into the area were thwarted effectively by British pressure. The Russians were not to be denied, however, and in the last half of the 19th century, the frontiers of the Czar's empire pushed inexorably southward. Again, commercial and security interests provided the justification and logic for Russian expansion. As Prince Gorchakov, the Russian Chancellor, noted in 1864:

> The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilized states which come into contact with half savage, wandering tribes possessing no fixed social organization. It invariably happens in such cases that the interests of security on the frontier, and of commercial relations, compel the more civilized states to exercise a certain ascendancy over neighbors whose turbulance and nomad instincts render them difficult to live with . . . The United States in America, France in Algeria, Holland in her colonies, England in India—all have been inevitably drawn to a course wherein ambition plays a smaller part than imperious necessity and where the greatest difficulty is knowing where to stop.[9]

The difficulty of "knowing where to stop" led to a second Anglo-Afghan war in 1878. Later, in the spring of 1885, as England and Russia were negotiating the Russian-Afghan border demarcation, the Russian Army seized the Afghan-held Panjdeh oasis near Herat. In response to this situation, the newspaper *Novosti* proclaimed that the Russian objective was not just Herat itself, which was only a window looking southeastward, but a Russian empire bordering the Indian Ocean, "in fulfillment of Russia's historic destiny."[10] While it is probably true that Russia's imperial expansionism was influenced to some degree by the inability of the Czars to control far-off military commanders and governors-general, they nevertheless readily accepted the new lands

where the Russian flag was planted, due in some part, no doubt, to this vision of a greater Russian empire bordering the Indian and Pacific Oceans.[11] The great Russian author, Dostoevsky, often had written of this "historic" destiny and believed that Russia's main outlet from years of isolation lay, not in Europe, but in Asia. In Europe, the Russians were hangers-on and slaves; in Asia, Russians could be masters.[12]

While it seemed possible that England and Russia might go to war, cooler heads prevailed and a series of negotiations subsequently led to boundary demarcations. The two countries mutually had recognized the existence of Afghanistan as a buffer state separating their respective spheres of influence. So long as the buffer state remained nonaligned, and as long as both powers remained in the area to manage their spheres of influence, mutual recognition for Afghanistan's neutral position could continue.

*Soviet Imperialism.* The aftermath of World War I saw the first crumblings of the British empire and as a consequence, a British disinterest in Afghanistan. The new Soviet regime had its own distractions in consolidating power and control internally, while fighting external powers bent on destruction of the Soviet state. Hence, Afghanistan found itself free to attain a greater degree of autonomy than it had enjoyed in its buffer state role.

However, while British interest and influence continued to wane, the Soviet Union, having stabilized its own situation, renewed its historic interest in Afghanistan and, in 1921, signed a Soviet-Afghan friendship treaty. That same year witnessed the signing of a Soviet-Iranian friendship treaty, the result of a Soviet attempt (1920-21) to dismember Iran by cloaking its military actions in that country in terms of "assistance" to an indigenous separatist movement in Ghilan. The Soviet Union subsequently invoked the "intervention" clause of the treaty to attempt, once again, to dismember Iran, this later episode occurring in 1944-46 in Azerbaijan. Thus, while Afghanistan has figured prominently in both Russian and Soviet plans, its importance takes on additional weight when linked to Iran, and the historic goal of an empire whose southern boundary lies on the Indian Ocean.

Soviet involvement (and investment) in Afghanistan continued at an accelerating pace throughout the following decades and reflects, to a great degree, the continuity of interests, vis a vis Afghanistan (and also Iran) between the Czarist and Soviet regimes. The decade

of the 1970's witnessed a further consolidation of Soviet influence in the country and in December 1979, the historical pursuit of the Czars was finally realized, in part. However, as *Novosti* noted so poignantly almost a century ago, Russia's destiny lay on the shores of the Indian Ocean (Iran), with Afghanistan as only the corridor making that objective possible. Afghanistan, thus, has importance above and beyond its position in Russian, and later Soviet, historical pursuits. While Russian and Soviet policymakers have recognized its geostrategic importance, it has only recently been recognized as such, at least officially, by US decisionmakers. It is to these geostrategic factors, and the place of Afghanistan within them, to which we now turn.

## GEOSTRATEGIC FACTORS

*Afghanistan as the Corridor to the Indian Ocean.* Historically, Russian access to the subcontinent and to warm water ports has been an essential ingredient of foreign policy, but traditionally, those goals most often have been pursued primarily (but not exclusively) for commercial interests. Today, however, traditional commercial interests in the region are ancillary to the interests of a superpower whose expanses stretch eastward from Europe to the Kamchatka Peninsula and the waters of the Pacific Ocean. Construction of land lines of communication, connecting European Russia with its Pacific regions, is difficult and costly because of the inhospitable weather and perma-frost conditions. A more cost effective, and technologically less difficult, route is provided by the seas. Yet, here also, the Soviet Union (and its Russian predecessor) has been stymied, both by the weather and by restricted egress/ingress transit lanes. It is within this context, at least in part, that Afghanistan, and the Soviet presence there, assumes significance. While the shores of the Indian Ocean, and hence warm water ports, have not yet been reached, they are considerably closer, thanks to the Afghanistan corridor; perhaps more importantly for the long run, Soviet hegemony in Afghanistan provides the stepping stone for extended influence throughout the region in a quest for access to warm water ports.

Afghanistan's significance, in terms of geostrategy, cannot be confined to this one long-range objective, however. Afghanistan also figures in the Soviet Union's core and middle-range

geostrategic objectives, which are the subjects of the succeeding discussion.

*Stability on the Southern Flank.* The Soviet Union, with thanks to its Czarist forefathers, retains a strong penchant for the security of the homeland and a paranoia about instability on its periphery. One need only review recent Soviet history to determine what the response to destabilizing situations has been: interventions in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Afghanistan in 1979. While the Afghanistan invasion represents the first full-scale invasion of a country outside of Eastern Europe, some of the same motivations were present. In general, these motivations centered around stability on the periphery and the fear of "spill-over" into the Soviet Union itself if the destabilizing circumstances were not eliminated. Specifically, in the case of Afghanistan, the security of the USSR itself (with its Central Asian Republics) was perceived as being endangered by the instability in Afghanistan and by the Iranian Revolution and the concommitant resurgence of Islamic fervor along the entire southern flank. As noted elsewhere, the decision to intervene in Afghanistan (as in Czechoslovakia) was motivated not only by the fear of instability and the perceived unreliability of the regime in power, but also by direct security considerations. These considerations contain elements of immediate (or core) as well as long-term interests.[13]

*The China Link.* Afghanistan perhaps also figures, if only in a minor role, in the Soviet attempt to block Chinese influence in Southwest Asia and to perhaps, ultimately, outflank the PRC. A Soviet-dominated Afghanistan, an anti-Chinese India, and a Pakistan militarily and politically susceptible to the pressures of strong opponents on its periphery provide the necessary ingredients for the outflanking maneuver. While China has not been extensively involved in the Southwest Asian region, it has and continues to cultivate ties with Pakistan (and with Iran during the Shah's reign), and provides limited support to the Afghan freedom fighters. China's interest, of course, was to see Afghanistan remain a neutral, buffer state which would limit Soviet expansionism. Having failed in that, the PRC must now concentrate on countering further expansion (and hence, its own encirclement by adversaries) by erecting strong barriers against such a contingency.

From the Soviet perspective, Chinese relations with Pakistan, Iran, and other Gulf states, which developed steadily in the 1970's,

represented an effort to counter Soviet influence in the entire SWA region and, related to this, to weaken its immediate southern ally, Afghanistan. One author has linked the China factor with the motivations for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

> One explanation for the Soviet decision to acquire a new client state (despite the onerous commitments the relationship implies) is to be found in Sino-Soviet rivalry, which had become more extensive throughout Asia. The decision to consolidate Soviet dominance in Afghanistan may be viewed as a decision to forestall an extension of Chinese influences and to deny China any new area in which to operate. The imminent completion of the Karakoram Highway from Pakistan to China may indeed have been an additional influence on the timing of the coup.[14]

Overall security considerations were undoubtedly of prime concern in the Soviet decisionmaking process surrounding Afghanistan, and the China factor has security implications. Once again, both the defensive and offensive elements of the invasion are highlighted. With regard to the Sino-Soviet rivalry, Soviet intervention can be viewed from the perspective of ensuring that Afghanistan was safely under Soviet control and not susceptible to Chinese influence (defensive), while at the same time, providing the offensive springboard for countering further Chinese influence in the region as a whole and, ultimately, for outflanking the PRC.

These geostrategic factors, and the plausible objectives that are embodied in them, parallel and make possible other objectives, mainly the quest for the economic wealth of the Persian Gulf region.

## ECONOMIC FACTORS

*Persian Gulf Oil.* Recent revised estimates of the Defense Intelligence Agency indicate that, contrary to earlier Central Intelligence Agency estimates, the Soviet Union will continue to produce sufficient amounts of oil to satisfy domestic demands while remaining a net exporter. The question of the oil reserves of the Persian Gulf in Soviet foreign policy must be viewed, then, within the context of denial to the Western nations and Japan which are so dependent upon it. More importantly, control over Afghanistan means that the Persian Gulf oil resources are that much closer to the Soviet's grasp and hence, that much closer to Soviet influence over the oil flow.

Just how much influence the Soviet Union can wield over the Persian Gulf region from its foothold in Afghanistan is dependent upon numerous factors some of which are ultimately beyond Soviet control (US foreign policy in the Gulf, for example). Despite these "unmanipulative" variables, however, the instability of the region offers up opportunities for penetration and influence extension. This is not to ignore the fact that the unstable conditions also restrict, or at least constrain, Soviet opportunities. The Soviet "stake" in the Iran-Iraq War helps illustrate the opportunities as well as the restraints upon Soviet penetration of the area.

*Iran-Iraq War.* The outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq has propelled the Soviet Union into a "potentially" strategic windfall position. By arming both sides, Moscow has been able to play a significant role in ensuring that neither opponent gains a clear upperhand in the conflict. By doing so, the Soviets are, at least potentially, in a good position to mediate an end to the war and to capitalize on what has been termed the "Tashkent Syndrome."[15] This strategy, frequently termed "Pax Sovietica," is not without potential pitfalls. If either belligerent perceives a shift in Soviet support for itself, in favor of its opponent, Soviet hopes for a mediator role could be undermined completely.[16]

On the other hand, the Soviet strategy could become one which has been termed the "Somalia Syndrome," referring to the fact that they might switch partners if they perceive their long-term interests as lying with one or the other (in the case of the Iran-Iraq War—with Iran) and if they have assurances beforehand of a political foothold. The pitfalls of the "switch" strategy are also obvious, particularly assurances of Soviet influence in Iran, given that country's antithesis for the atheistic Communist ideology. Yet, the Soviet Union has not been lax in preparing itself for a possible switch to Iran. While stressing the compatibility of Marxism and Islam, in order to mitigate potential barriers to Soviet influence because of religious ferver, it also has tried to woo Iran with economic incentives, particularly in the trade sphere. The Soviet Union's (and its Czarist predecessor's) historic interest in Iran, when combined with its growing schism with Iraq, could portend just such a switch. Before and since the war, the Soviet Union has consistently supported the Khomeini regime, vis a vis the United States, while emphasizing that its (i.e., the USSR's) policy is one of genuine friendship and good neighborliness. This propaganda

campaign may be viewed within the context of "softening" the anti-Soviet sentiment of the regime with the hope of enhancing Soviet influence in Iran, or, in the least, ensuring continued anti-American antipathy—a Soviet plus.

A switch to Iran, however, would alienate not only Iraq, but also those Arab countries which have sided, if somewhat ambiguously, with it, most notably Saudi Arabia. Hence, it is not without its pitfalls.

Still, the outcome of the mediation strategy, and if that fails, the "switch," could represent a significant gain for the Soviet Union, not only in relation to the "denial" aspect of the oil resources of Iran and/or Iraq, but, perhaps, also to the issue of access to warm water ports. At that point, should it ever occur, it would be reasonable to expect the Soviets to consolidate power through whatever means (perhaps the Afghanistan model) in order to translate "access" into "control."

## POLICY OPTIONS

The Soviet Union's position in Afghanistan is not as untenable as many Western observers would like us to believe. Although the number of Soviet troops required to "pacify" the entire country will probably not be realized, perhaps because of other commitments to respond quickly and massively to potential areas of conflict (Poland, for example), the apparent Soviet near-term objective (which does not require any significant increase in combat troops) is to control the cities and lines of communications, keep the freedom fighters at bay in the countryside, and work toward a broader base of support for the government. With reference to this latter objective, the Soviet Union has placed Soviet Uzbeks, primarily, but also Turkmen and Tajiiks, in administrative positions within the Afghan government in attempts to build up support for the Karmal regime. Overall, the Soviet Union apparently has committed itself to a long struggle in Afghanistan, and will not withdraw until it has determined that it can do so with confidence that the Afghan government can maintain control. The Soviet Union already has demonstrated its "staying power" in other areas of the world (the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and Cuba, for example), and that power is strengthened in Afghanistan because of the proximity to the USSR's borders. This core interest

is compatible with, and supported by, the middle-range objectives of self-extension and economic betterment (as was previously discussed). Also, withdrawal from the country before the situation is deemed "under control" runs contrary to both core and middle-range objectives.

Further, Soviet presence in Afghanistan must be linked to the long-established and continuing interest in Iran. If the opportunity should present itself (and with the complete collapse of the Khomeini regime within the realm of possibility), the Red Army in Afghanistan is in a strong position to exert influence over events in Iran, perhaps with the USSR once again invoking the 1921 treaty and using it to cloak a dismembering of the country. In this context, Azerbaijan could once again become the focus of Soviet pressure. *Le Figaro* noted this possibility even before the Afghanistan invasion:

> The USSR has always sought a land bridge between its territory and the Mediterranean. It has friendly regimes in Syria and Iraq but is separated from those countries by Azarbayjan—an Iranian province. The USSR occupied that province in World War II but had to withdraw from it in 1946 under US pressure. It so happens that since the beginning of the Khomeini revolution, Azarbayjan has shown a tendency toward insubordination to the new Iran. If that insubordination could be pushed by Moscow to national insurrection and even the proclamation of independence, Tabriz could in the future become the capital of a new ally and even a satellite of the USSR.[17]

Even if this scenario never transpired, the Soviets still have ethnic and political tools at their disposal to penetrate Afghanistan's neighbors—Iran and Pakistan: training and arming of the Baluchis for guerrilla activity against the Pakistani and Iranian regimes, and in Iran, the Tudeh Party, which could become a more significant factor (or built up into a significant factor) as factionalism increases. A total political breakdown in either of these countries could invite Soviet intervention.

Whatever the next few years may bring for this volatile area, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan has set the stage for future expansionism, and the Kremlin decisionmakers undoubtedly recognize this. Thus, the most viable option, and the one they are carrying out now, is to dig in for a long stay. To withdraw before the "task" is finished would mean not only a retreat from vital defensive interests, but also a back-down from middle and long-range objectives for the entire area.

## ENDNOTES

1. Warhurst claims that the invasion was a defensive action taken to support a "friendly" government within the Soviet sphere of influence. See "Afghanistan—A Dissenting Appraisal," *Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)*, September 1980.

2. For a discussion of the "China" factor in the Shaba II invasion, see Valenta and Butler, "East German Security Policies in Africa," in *Eastern Europe and the Third World*, ed. by Michael Radu, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981, pp. 153-155.

3. Jiri Valenta, "From Prague to Kabul: The Soviet Style of Invasion," *International Security*, Vol. 5, Fall 1980, p. 130.

4. Patrick J. Garrity, "The Soviet Military Stake in Afghanistan: 1956-1979," *RUSI*, September 1980, p. 34.

5. Valenta, "From Prague to Kabul," p. 125.

6. *Soviet Report*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Washington: Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 1979, p. 2.

7. Lieutenant Colonel Terry Heyns of the National Defense University makes this point succinctly in "Why Afghanistan Will Not Be the Soviet Union's Vietnam," to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Military Review*.

8. John C. Griffiths, *Afghanistan, Key to a Continent*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1981, p. 32.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

11. Perhaps an interesting parallel can be drawn here between the Czar-military commander relationship and the influence exerted on the Kremlin by the reports of the Soviet military delegations to Afghanistan prior to the invasion. While these delegations were no doubt under control of the Kremlin policymakers, their statements upon return to the USSR were most likely influential factors in "planting of the flag" on Afghan soil in December 1979.

12. Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky, His Life and Work*, trans. by Michael A. Minihan, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967, p. 646.

13. Valenta, "From Prague to Kabul," p. 117-119. Valenta notes in part, "Any impact of Muslim insurgency or Amin's nationalism and search for independence upon the USSR was not immediate but rather very remote. One must consider long-term demographic, economic, religious and cultural trends to understand the Soviet leadership's concern about the potential spillover effects of the Muslim religious movement." p. 119.

14. Shahram Chubin, "Soviet Policy Toward Iran and the Gulf," *Adelphi Paper No. 157*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1980, p. 6.

15. A reference to the 1966 role of the USSR in mediating a peace agreement, in the city of Tashkent, between India and Pakistan after the 1965 war. The means for performing a mediator role are realized through maintaining reasonably close relations with both parties (Iran and Iraq) so that it will be in a commanding role, vis a vis mediation, if and when peace talks begin.

16. Evidence, in fact, suggests that the USSR, while supplying limited quantities of arms to both Iran and Iraq, has been offering larger economic and political incentives to Iran. For a fuller discussion of the Soviet strategy in the Iran-Iraq War, see LeRoy W. Chapple, "The Soviet Union and Iran: Strategic Implications for the United States Navy," (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1981), pp. 74-80.

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This memorandum centers its attention primarily upon Afghanistan and Iran, with only passing reference to Pakistan. Soviet interests in Iran are inextricably connected to the Afghanistan issue since a Soviet foothold in the latter presents both opportunities and risks in a policy aimed at, if not control, then influence projection into Iran. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, then, can be viewed not only in the context of securing stability on the USSR's southern border, but also in the broader context of an extension of Soviet hegemony into the Persian Gulf.

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17. "Le Figaro Sees 'Complementary' USSR, U.S. Interests in Iran," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)—Western Europe*, December 4, 1979, p. K-1.

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